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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEAWJC/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHOND/DIRONDPC WASHDC
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SUBJECT: CODEL MEEKS MEETS WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS

¶1. (U) June 4, 2007; 300PM, U.S. Embassy

¶2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY)
Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA)
Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-OH)
Rep. Linda Sanchez (D-CA)
Polcouns John Creamer
Pol officer (notetaker)

COLOMBIA

Former President and Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria
Polo Democratico leader Gustavo Petro
Polo Democratico Secretary General Daniel Garcia Pena
Polo Democratico Representative River Franklin Legro

Summary

¶3. (SBU) A bipartisan Congressional delegation led by Representative Gregory Meeks meeting with opposition leaders on June 4 led to a fruitful exchange of opinions on the U.S.-Colombian Trade Promotion Act (CTPA), Plan Colombia, the Justice and Peace Law, and the need for greater social investment. End summary.

CTPA

¶4. (SBU) Former Colombian President and Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria said the U.S. Congress should not "discriminate" against Colombia by failing to pass the U.S.-Colombian Trade Promotion Act (CTPA). Gaviria said the United States has free trade agreements with Mexico, Central America, and Chile and is soon to approve agreements with Panama and Peru; it must not punish its strongest ally in the region. Rep. Meeks agreed with Gaviria and said he supported a free trade agreement with Colombia. Rep. Sanchez disagreed, stating it was not about discrimination, it was

about making a stronger agreement that addressed gaps in the current accord. Polo Democratico Senator Gustavo Petro said the Agreement needed greater emphasis on protecting Colombia's agricultural sector. He contended narcotraffickers would be the biggest beneficiaries of the agreement, because they would be able to buy or steal productive land to the detriment of vulnerable populations.

Plan Colombia

¶ 15. (SBU) Petro said the U.S. anti-drug policy needed to be more effective, asserting that Plan Colombia needed to de-emphasize its military component and instead focus more on underlying social causes of the drug trade and narco corruption. He said more U.S. aid should be directed to the Prosecutor General's Office, arguing that the key to ending narcotrafficking in Colombia was to break the ties between some politicians and narcotraffickers. Codel members agreed Plan Colombia should have a greater "soft-side" emphasis.

Justice and Peace Law

¶ 16. (SBU) Gaviria criticized the Justice and Peace Law (JPL) process and the GoC handling of the para-political scandal, but said Colombian institutions would have to work with it. Petro said the Justice and Peace Law provided an adequate framework for dismantling paramilitary ties with politicians, but reiterated that the Prosecutor General's Office and the judiciary needed more resources to do their jobs. Polo Secretary General Daniel Garcia Pena noted the Uribe

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administration takes credit for the truth emerging from the JPL process, but said that without opposition pressure and court-mandated changes the GOC's originally proposed JPL bill would have maintained impunity. Rep. Schmidt agreed that the solution to the problem was to increase resources for the Prosecutor General's Office so it could do a more effective job investigating and convicting suspected paramilitaries and their supporters.

Social Investment

¶ 17. (SBU) Codel members also discussed the need for more support for the Afro-Colombian community, land issues, and social investment. Opposition leaders recognized the need for greater attention to the Afro-Colombian and other marginalized communities which suffer high rates of poverty. Polo Democratico Representative River Franklin Legro praised the recent appointment of an Afro-Colombian Minister, but said discrimination against Afro-Colombians remains a serious obstacle to progress. He said all Colombians needed to become more aware of this humanitarian situation.

¶ 18. (U) House Western Hemisphere Subcommittee Staff cleared this cable.

Drucker